

NLS Question of the School 2026
The Subject Supposed to Know in Supervision
Argument

by Patricia Bosquin-Caroz

*"Our art of the subject supposed to know is
an objection to the contemporary master-
discourse ... insofar as that discourse is
now based on knowledge posed as
absolute semblance.*

JACQUES-ALAIN MILLER, « Notre sujet supposé savoir »

In the analytic experience, there are several subjects supposed to know. Jacques-Alain Miller sketched them out in the context of a Study Day on the theme "Our Subject Supposed to Know". He singled out three instances of it:

The first is that of the subject "who comes to see us and from whom we expect that he inform us of his reasons". The second is the analyst himself, who is supposed to know how to interpret and generate the meaning of 'I don't know what I'm saying'. Finally, the third occurrence of the subject supposed to know is the consequence of the one before: it implies the emergence of the subject's belief in a legible, decipherable and interpretable unknown knowledge. It establishes "the position of the unconscious as a ciphering power".¹ It is the interpreting unconscious, transferred to the analyst, that puts the analysand to analytical work. The analyst supports the transference in the knowledge that he is not the subject supposed to know. As Freud indicates, he is advised to put aside all acquired knowledge, in particular what he has learned from the experience of other cases.

But what becomes of the subject supposed to know at the end of the analytic path? "In principle, [says Lacan] the psychoanalyst knows what becomes of it. It falls, that is for sure."² It becomes the residue, the remainder, the waste product of the analytic operation. The fall of the subject supposed to know occurs simultaneously with the reduction of the analyst to the object a. And he knows that, in the end, he "coincides

¹ Cf. Miller J.-A., "Notre sujet supposé savoir", *La Lettre mensuelle de l'ECF*, n°254, January 2007, p. 3-6. (Unpublished in English.)

² Lacan J., *Le Séminaire*, livre XV, *L'Acte psychanalytique*, texte établi par J.-A. Miller, Paris, Seuil & Le Champ Freudien, 2024, p. 109. (Unpublished in English.)

with the dis-being that the subject supposed to know undergoes [...] [and he] gives body to what becomes of the subject in the form of the object little a.”³

If, in an analysis, the subject supposed to know is established with a view to its fall, it probably has a different destiny in the experience of supervision. The question immediately arises: how to situate the subject supposed to know? Is it embodied in the figure of the supervising analyst, in the supervisee, or even in the case brought to supervision? Can the three occurrences of the subject supposed to know in the analytic experience be transposed just like that to the situation of supervision? They are comparable in several respects.

Firstly, one goes to a supervisor who is supposed to know how to supervise. Then, although supervision proceeds in a permissive, rather than an inhibiting dimension, it can nevertheless give rise to the impression that ‘I don't know what I'm saying or doing’. While the person in supervision is encouraged to speak freely about a case from his practice, his own case is a matter for his personal analysis.

But beware, the supervisor is not in the place of the object cause of desire, as the matheme of the analytical discourse indicates. Rather, as Lacan put it, he is in the position of “second subjectivity”.⁴ Thus, the supervisee would be invited to join the supervisor in this place of “second subjectivity”, which leads J.-A. Miller to say that supervision “re-subjectifies”.⁵ What does this mean? It goes without saying that this partner situation differs from the analytical relation and is closer to an intersubjective relationship. Does the discussion, conversation and, why not, “provoked elaboration”⁶ therefore relate to this mode of exchange?

Lacan preferred the term “super-audition”⁷ to that of “control” or “supervision”. So would it be a matter of the supervisor hearing what the supervisee misses or ignores? Supervision would then be understood as a “supervision of the signifier”.⁸

And which knowledge are we supposing? Supposed is not exposed. If the beginner can occasionally learn to construct a case, or even to write it, he will quickly learn that a construction is not immutable, nor is it a straitjacket in which to confine a speaking subject. Moreover, doesn't the construction, in most cases, rather turn out to be a

³ *Ibid*, p. 112.

⁴ Lacan J., “The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis”, *Écrits*, trans. B. Fink, London, Norton, 2006, p. 210.

⁵ Miller J.-A., “La confidence des contrôleurs. Le débat. La matinée”, *La Cause freudienne*, n°52, p. 142-143. (Unpublished in English.)

⁶ Cf. Miller J.-A., “Five Variations on Provoked Elaboration”, available online.

⁷ Lacan J., “Columbia University Lecture on the Symptom, 1. 12. 1975”, *The Lacanian Review* 12, p. 76

⁸ La Sagna P., quoted by Caroz G., “Le contrôle resubjective”, *L'HebdoBlog* no. 287, 4 December 2022. (Unpublished in English.)

knowledge to be deconstructed? Doesn't the gain in knowledge emerge unbeknownst to the protagonists, as a surprise effect, manifested in a well-saying?

How do the different functions of supervision - between discussing a case, shedding light on it and rectifying the practitioner's position - present today? This year, based on the theme of the subject supposed to know we will consider this from the point of view of the supervisor. It will be an opportunity to update the practice of supervision in the NLS.

See you at our *Question of the School* event on 17th January!

Translation: Natalie Wülfing